

Bill targets law that lets minors drink

Supporters say it would help reverse Wisconsin's high tolerance for binge drinking.

By SCOTT BAUER
Associated Press

MADISON — Children could no longer belly up to the bar in Wisconsin under a bill that supporters said Wednesday would go a long way toward reversing what they say is the state's high tolerance for binge drinking.

Under state law, anyone younger than the legal drinking age of 21 can drink in a bar as long as they are with their parents, guardians or spouse. Bartenders are given the discretion to determine whether the child should be served.

Unlike other anti-drinking measures that have drawn broad opposition from bars and taverns, this proposal is backed by the Wisconsin Tavern League. That powerful lobbying force represents 5,000 bars and liquor stores and has fiercely fought other proposals targeting drinking. No one from the league testified at the hearing.

Wisconsin should not be defined by its culture of drinking acceptance, said Tom Farley, the brother of comedian Chris Farley, who grew up in Madison before leaving for a career on "Saturday Night Live" and in films.

Chris Farley, who battled alcohol abuse, died in 1997 of an accidental drug overdose. His brother Tom now runs the Chris Farley Foundation, which works to combat substance abuse.

"This is one small piece in the overall process of trying to address our drinking culture," said Dr. Mike Miller, who specialized in treating addictions.

Tom Farley and others who supported the bill at a Wednesday hearing before a Senate committee said it was a good first step but more needs to be done.

The proposal wouldn't outright repeal the law. Instead, if it still would allow those between the ages of 18 and 20 to drink with their parents in a bar.

"This bill certainly will not solve all of this state's problems with alcohol," said the bill's sponsor, Sen. Judy Robson, D-Beloit.

Doctors speaking in support said a change in the law is needed, given new research that shows that young people who drink are more disposed to form addictions that will continue through their lives.

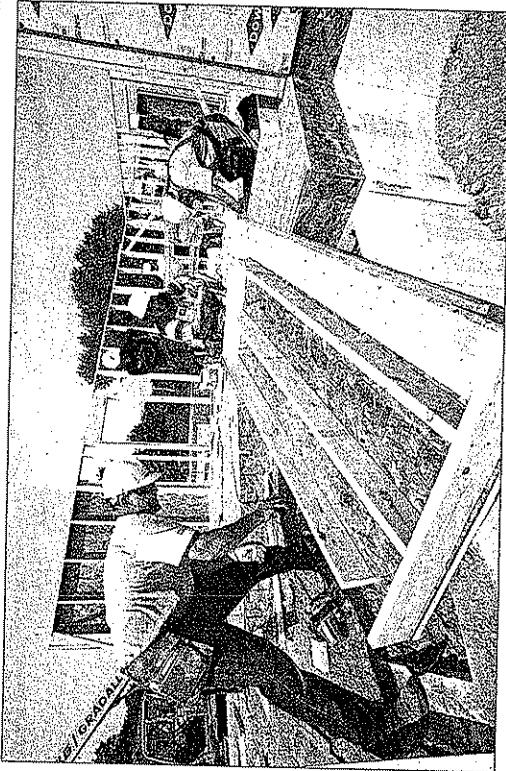
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While no group is registered as opposing the bill, a vice president of Wollersheim Whisky in Prairie du Sac spoke against it at the hearing. Julie Coquard said parents frequently bring their children on tours of the winery and give them drinks from their wine glasses.

Fourteen other states have exemptions that allow minors to drink with their family in certain circumstances, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. The group's research did not break down how many other states allow such drinking in bars.



NEW HABITAT HOME ON NORTH SIDE



Man charged with death of girlfriend's son

APPLETON — A 25-year-old Oshkosh man faces two felony charges after his girlfriend's young son died of traumatic brain injury.

David L. Reimer was charged Tuesday with first-degree reckless homicide and child abuse. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 70 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

Authorities say 2½-month-old Logan Boyer was found unconscious and not breathing in May, the morning after he was left in Reimer's care. Logan died four days later.

An autopsy revealed multiple rib fractures, a broken arm and head injuries.

Reimer told authorities he found the baby slouched over in a baby seat in the morning and called an ambulance.

Vandals free animals at Chippewa Falls zoo

CHIPPENDALE FALLS — Vandals

lives in treating addictions. Police also are all for it. "It shouldn't be the parents' decision any more," Two Rivers Police Chief Joseph Collins said.

Steve Apps - State Journal